

Written by David Harvey, abuse survivor in the Buffalo Catholic Diocese:

When I was 8 years old, I was serially raped by Father Dave Peter of St. Edmond Church in Tonawanda, NY. My complaints to the resident priest, Father Murph, echoed in silence while my lack of understanding of the inner workings of the catholic church disqualifies me from any compensation. I have given my story to the Buffalo News with the hopes that they would publish my story for I feel that the public needs to hear about the atrocity...the ferocity of my abuse so they understand the depth of personal injury and the scope of devastation to not only myself and my family but the parishes that had pedophiles routinely and insidiously placed into their neighborhoods, unknowing of the monsters that had access to their boys, a true crime against humanity; but the Buffalo News has never published any iota of my story and in my opinion has treated my abuse as a child with that same indifference as the Catholic church. I lay bare my greatest secret, my greatest embarrassment, that which has left me at times feeling like I am walking in a dead man's body, to bring back some authenticity to my life...to be whom I was before I was raped, whom I was destined to be...to return me my voice. I only ask that you share my story ubiquitously and ask your friends and family to share it also so the whole, very ugly truth, one that the church and others do not want you to know about, be told in all its indecency and malignance. This is long for social media, I know, but is in the latter part of my story where the real damage of the Catholic Church's sexual abuse scandal is revealed, so I ask for your patience and for that I give you a very sincere thank you. Here is my story:

When I was around 8, a group of around 10 altar boys, my brother, a friend of ours, and I had the opportunity to go onto a yacht owned by a well-known, local funeral home chain in Buffalo, NY, along with Father Dave, whom just arrived at our parish without any notice, and another man affiliated with the funeral home. Father Dave introduced the other man after all the parents had left and told all of us that they would give us tours of the cabin once we were on the lake. We all were excited, coming from a working-class neighborhood, we didn't this opportunity, so it was clearly exciting for all of us.

When we were far enough away from the land, they started the individual tours, I was the third to go. It was a large cabin...I went down the stairs and turned back toward Father Dave, when I turned around he was just about on top of me as the other man stood on the steps blocking the entrance, this is when Father Dave said that I was supposed to have my t-shirt tucked into my underwear. Before I could even respond, he knelt down in front of me and began to tuck my t-shirt into my underwear...the other man just intently stared at me...I couldn't look away...I knew something horrible was going to happen. Father Dave began to fondle my genitals and told me to "just relax...I'm almost done." His hands engulfed me. I remember swaying back and forth with the pressure of his hands pushing on my body and I remember his breath when he pressed his face against mine as he began to insert his finger into me...all the while the man on the stairs stared at me nervously and yet, devouring my fear. I don't know how long it lasted, he stood up and said, "There, that looks better" and I immediately pulled my t-shirt out of my underwear. I just walked up the stairs and realized my brother might be next.

Once at deck level, Father Dave asked who wanted to go next and I insisted that my twin brother and friend would not be going down into the cabin. This was the first of many times Father Dave grabbed my neck like a vice, when my brother protested, I again insisted that they would not. Father Dave, still with my neck in his grip, said "Ok, let's see, who wants to drive the boat?" I was directed up the stairs to an upper deck where the steering wheel was located, Father Dave on the left side and the other man right behind me. He told me, as he gripped my neck hard enough to raise my shoulders, that if I tell

anyone what happened my brother might get hurt...he asked me, "You wouldn't want anything to happen to your twin brother...would you?" I just shook my head back and forth while staring ahead at the water and so my pact with the devil began. When we finally returned, he walked us to my parents and said the boys had a great time and complimented all three of us, all along repeatedly squeezing my neck to remind me of my promise. All the while I wondered was if I was bleeding and if it could be seen through my shorts.

I remember the dread that overwhelmed me; I was terrified that someone would find out that I was gay and that I was bound to be like Father Dave, a man that rapes and kills young boys, because that is what I thought gay men did; a belief legitimized by the church's homophobic rhetoric. I got through the terror by vowing to protect my brother, a psychological obsession that persisted many years after my abuse ended. The next time we went to church, we had to altar boy the 10 o'clock mass. When Father Dave arrived, he looked at the wine bottle and said they ran out and that I needed to go back to the kitchen with him to get some wine; he said with a smile, "You can be my wine boy from now on!" The resident priest at our parish, Father Murph, just kept his back to us...that was Father Murph's modus operandum, he kept his back to the abuse, as he did when Father Dave once tried to convince me to take a shower in this same room; all I could do is protest, "Why would I need to take a shower!?" Father Dave said that sometimes the altar boys "sweat during mass", all the while I looked to Father Murph for help and I only ever saw his back...every. single. time., he just kept his back to me and my panic. A glass shower in a room where young boys congregate with grown men...right next to the altar, a metaphor for the Catholic Church at large if ever there was one. What happened next represents the brazen audacity the permissive culture of the Catholic Church fostered.

The cafeteria was behind the church and could be easily accessed from the back of this room. Father Dave, just after the boat incident, paraded me through the church, in front of my parents, family, and the congregation, my mom always smiling, completely oblivious to the abuse I endured. Our parents entrusted our well being with Fathers Murph and Dave and the Catholic Church because that was what you did as a faithful parishioner...as a devout Roman Catholic and what the Catholic Church utterly took advantage of when fielding pedophiles across the United States. He walked me in front of my parents and we left the church out the side doors and took a left. Father Dave looked behind me, stopped me, and reminded me of my promise and said as long as I kept quiet all would be fine; I just nodded yes. We proceeded to the cafeteria behind the church to get the wine and where he abused me multiple times, often penetrating me and he seemed to enjoy comforting me during my pain; whenever we walked back he had a vice grip on my neck and we never said anything, all I could hear was our soft soles tapping against the tile floor in this starkness of this empty room. I was his wine boy, turning wine to blood before every mass; it got to the point that I would wear two pair of underwear so that if I did bleed it wouldn't show on my Sunday's best.

I cannot emphasize enough how brazen Father Dave was, he was a fiend, and Father Murph was unapologetically defiant of all that is decent and the façade and spectacle of mass. One afternoon my parents dropped my twin brother and me off at the rectory...it was at Father Dave's request and I protested as much as possible but with enough restraint so they wouldn't wonder at my motive. Father Murph was sitting in a chair reading a book by the door and Father Dave came out of a hallway on the opposite side of the room and greeted us...I had no idea why we were there and I was terrified for my brother. Father Dave welcomed us and said that he wanted to talk to us about our spirituality, but that he would do it individually. He looked at my brother and said why don't you go first, flashing me a

casual glance. I was insistent that we should go together, he told my brother to come with him and I turned to Father Murph and asked him to let me go with my brother and he said, "It's alright," I quietly pleaded with him to let me go with Steven and he just said it would be ok, never looking up from his book. When my brother finally emerged from the hallway he didn't look like he had something to hide and I would know because he could not hide anything from me if I was looking for it. It was my turn.

This was unlike most other times, I was in his home and my brother was in hearing distance, I thought I needed to be as quiet as possible so I wouldn't even respond to his questions...we both knew what was going to happen anyways. I remember him pushing me up against a wall, pressing his body against mine...his breath...the pressure and him pushing me down and pressing his genitals against my face...I couldn't breathe...the smells...then on the floor...then I checked out... Father Dave was brazen, like a man who couldn't get caught...and I was devastated because...part of me enjoyed some of what happened to me.

I was continuously abused until my mother took us out of the altar boys after hearing Father Dave speak sexually to our older brother on the phone. Father Dave left our church with as little fanfare as he had when he arrived; in his obituary it shows a hiatus of about 5 years from serving in churches after St. Edmond until he returns and bounces from church to church like he did before he ended up at St. Edmond. I never considered that he was about to bring his pestilence to another kid, I just was so thankful that he was gone...I was just glad I did have to be alone with him anymore. But that is the beginning of my story because Father Dave wasn't just abusing my body, he was planting deep seeds of anguish nourished by the confusion of a kid that never looked at himself as a victim because I knew, in a way, I was Father Dave myself, long before I ever met him. I was a kid that never realized that those seeds that were planted would flourish for decades and affect every little thing in my life with a hate with the strength of rage and the speed of fury...at my worst, I had no prejudice, I hated everyone. I was robbed of me and everyone was going to pay for it; I even promised myself that after my first failed suicide attempt and my rage grew formidable as many would-be opponents found out.

There is no finality to the effects of my abuse, no place where they may rest, rather, they are continually interjecting within my life and the lives of people around me. Raping a child has far reaching and pervasive effects that no compensation can pacify. As my brother explained it, I held my family emotionally hostage for over a decade and there was fear at my capacity for violence and lack of control; one only had to look at me wrong to be subject to my wrath. So, there I was for years, thinking it was my destiny to become my abuser and as time went on I grew closer and closer to extreme violence...maybe even murder, satisfying my life's greatest lie and self-fulfilling prophecy. I was attracted to guys my age and I hated them for that and as they became both my lust and my misery, the fecundity of my abuser's attacks peered through my eyes to get a glimpse into a future that haunted me like my shadow.

But it is in degree where you will find the damage of Father Dave. So now my deepest secrets will spill onto the page and over the minds of my family, friends, and strangers...a perennial embarrassment at my incapacity to live, to be like everyone else for decades of my existence...which still echoes in me to this day. The rage. My mind was rage, there was no separation, they functioned as one movement, married in the ripeness of my formative years. I slept, woke, and walked as rage. Between finite lapses of ordinary, my imaginings were grotesque and wrought with violence; tearing the flesh from a skull, breaking legs until they no longer resembled anything, bashing heads until they were water...the

ferocity...the rage...and that could be just in the time span it would take to walk one city block. My violence even scared me; was I really capable of my thoughts, the constant devouring of anyone that I encountered while I casually carried on a conversation with them? I became more my imaginings than my true self, more in my head than out there, where everyone else seemed to reside. I was a damaged boy, ravaged by a priest and the Catholic Church, trying to figure the growing pain out by himself and I was failing every second. I couldn't do it; I was tempted by my violence; I was addicted to it, I tasted it in other's fear, I needed other's fear to keep my violence alive...to keep me alive. Ultimately, the repeated rape was my clenched fists and teeth, the space within my head pulling my strings of destruction...I was the puppet and puppet master and mostly out of control pulling from the firm grasp of my (abuser's) psychological hold.

Too much anger for one kid to bear; my father once described me as a serial killer without his first kill and before I could try to take my life again, on the birthday I vowed to end my pain, I was forced into a mental health facility where they poured pills down my throat with no regard to the many tremors they created...more meds for meds sake as I smoked my lungs dry. After living like a lab rat, I finally was released from this "mental health" prison and one morning, I woke with lucidity and it was clear I had to do something different; I was going to succeed my next suicide attempt, I was going to kill someone or many, and/or I was going to spend the rest of my life in jail. And I knew, one of the greatest challenges I was going to have to overcome was my reputation, which preceded me wherever I went. But I was determined to end my torment created by Fathers Dave and Murph and the Catholic Church while despising them all...a journey of relived pain and my inability to forgive myself.

The front of the man on the yacht that devoured my fear with his eyes, combined with Father Murph's back to me, embodies the Catholic Church. While I no longer have deep, abiding anger for Father Dave, the Catholic Church repulses me, especially the Buffalo Dioceses...the ambivalence...indifference...their lack of discretion and their policy to take child rapists and move them from one unsuspecting parish to the next and allow them to flourish within the utmost faith of their followers until they get caught raping another child and are sent to another unsuspecting parish. Father Dave destroyed me; he devastated my opportunity, my family, and the many friends and strangers whom I relentlessly terrified, but he did it with the consent and support of the Catholic Church. Apologies fall well short because the effects of abuse still linger, they do not end, victims just learn to accept our new reality and move forward with the best of our abilities, wounded and hopefully determined. I'm 47 and I cry most every day; I have a daughter and I am terrified for her and I am still capable, after all these years, of becoming quite angry, albeit on rare occasion and with the discretion of a wisdom that comes with one that loses everything and then has the courage to choicelessly stay there...aware.

It is through many years of this awareness that I am able to be...just be, with little rage and little interference from the events that deeply scarred me during my formative years. I have either been approached to file a lawsuit against the church or recommended it to no avail. The compensation program only pertains to those children that filed an official report with the Buffalo Diocese between rapes and/or prior to the compensation program being announced, not to priests like Father Murph whom failed a young boy and, in all likelihood, many young boys as did many of his contemporaries from the grunts to the many Popes that oversaw the greatest pedophile ring in recorded history. It has never been about the money; in fact, it is bizarre to me to accept money for being abused by Father Dave and the Catholic Church, if I was awarded a large sum and bought a house my abuse would engulf me. There is no other scenario that reflects the ultimate betrayal of the Catholic Church, the untold

horrors they are responsible for against our most vulnerable, and the ubiquitous effects that plague not only the victims of their sanctioned rape but the families, especially their parents, and everyone they came into contact. How do you put a price tag on the destruction of my life, what I was to be, what I will never know?...what is that really worth? No, this isn't about vindication, or reparations, or even justice, our society failed me and the vast multitude of victims a long time ago...this letter is for that little boy, for all those little boys and girls, to remind them of the voice, that authenticity, they had before they were abused; it is there, deep within and if you get through the tears and the pain and the agony of the years I promise you the voice will be there, you will be there, and at times even your young laughter will be heard again, and not the church or the priest...nor the news or politicians...nor anyone will stop it from being heard again. What do I want most in my life...to be me again.